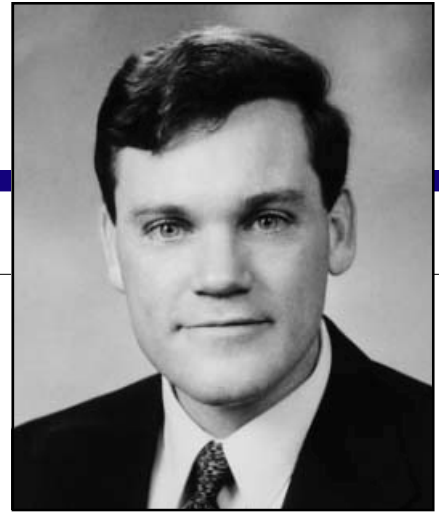


Representative Brad Benson

6th District



The 1998 Agenda

Holding the Line

Winter 1998

Dear neighbors,

Working families live within their means. Their government should do the same. When the Legislature meets this year, you can be sure of two things: We will hold the line on spending, and we will not raise taxes. Thanks to a healthy economy propelled by Republican-led tax reforms, our state has a budget surplus of \$861 million. Already, debates in Olympia revolve around the best way to use this surplus money. This year, we'll decide whether to keep it in reserve, use it to fund transportation, or pass further tax reductions. This is only one of several key issues we will consider in the upcoming session. This newsletter explains what you can expect from me and from your state government in the coming months. Please take a moment to read it, and share your thoughts with me by phone, letter, e-mail or even a personal visit. Remember, I represent you. To do my job right, I need your advice and suggestions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Brad Benson in cursive script.

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TOP ISSUES for 1998 Education • Transportation • Budget • Crime**Transportation —
stretching the dollars we have**

When the state has a budget surplus of almost \$1 billion, citizens shouldn't be asked to pay higher taxes. Yet that's precisely what our governor has proposed. He wants an 11-cent gas tax increase.

We have a better idea: Pay for needed road improvements without raising taxes. We can expand I-90 in the Spokane Valley, fix Highway 395 north of Spokane and improve other local roads without taking more money from the public. We have more than enough money already.

I know how 6th District citizens feel about raising the gas tax. They oppose it, and so do I. So do Republicans in the House and Senate. That's why you won't see a gas tax increase this year. We won't consider it.

Instead, we are looking at several other ways to fund transportation improvements. At this early stage, I do not know which plan will be approved, but I can share some of the proposals we are discussing. Our final decision is likely to include a combination of some or all of the following elements:

- Shifting additional revenue from the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) to transportation improvements;

- Applying a portion of the budget surplus to transportation projects;
- Developing new cost-efficient construction procedures;
- Pursuing savings suggested by results of a Department of Transportation audit to be completed early this year; and
- Offering sales tax credits on transportation projects.

Where the state's Motor Vehicle Tax goes:

The state expects to collect nearly \$1.6 billion in motor vehicle excise taxes during the 1997-99 biennium. Here's where most of that money goes:

Local Transit Agencies	\$428 million
State General Fund	\$363 million
Transportation Fund	\$255 million
Ferry Construction	\$118 million
Cities (police and fire)	\$85 million
Counties (criminal justice)	\$80 million
Small and medium cities	\$69 million
State Ferry operations	\$59 million
Counties (public health)	\$43 million
Cities (criminal justice)	\$32 million
Counties	\$23 million
Dept. of Licensing	\$23 million

The budget — holding the line

I see no reason to alter the spending limits established by Initiative 601, but it seems that there is always a new proposal to amend, alter or scrap the will of the people. It makes no sense.

The limits established by 601 are reasonable and fair. They account for inflation and population growth. When people talk about the budget, they sometimes fail to grasp the sheer magnitude of the dollars they discuss — every dime generated by you, the taxpayers. Our budget for 1997-99 is slightly more than \$19 billion. If we divided that money up, we could give every man, woman and child in our state about \$3,400. What does that mean? To me, it means the government has more than enough money already. That's why I will oppose any attempt to change the 601 limit.

Teen work rules

We can promote the values of work and personal responsibility by allowing young people to work. Our teens have very strict rules about when they can work, yet they can "hang out" on the streets all night. This year, I will again introduce a bill that would restore parental authority over decisions regarding teens and work hours. Families should make these decisions, not the government.

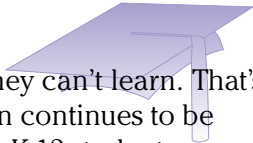
The 1998 Agenda – holding the line

Parental involvement and youth

Though we must demand accountability from our schools, we can't forget the vital role parents play in education. They have a responsibility too, and we can help them achieve it by supporting pro-family policies.

One such policy is a youth curfew. This session, I will introduce a bill to establish a set of curfew guidelines for municipalities. Young people don't need to be on the streets late at night. They should be home with their families. I believe that we have a solution to the constitutional questions that are often raised around this issue, and I hope we can report positive results this spring.

Education



When children can't read, they can't learn. That's why our priority in education continues to be improving the literacy of our K-12 students. Recent test scores among fourth-grade students show that less than half of them met the standards of reading ability for their age.

We know that part of the problem has to do with unproven teaching techniques such as the whole language approach, and we have seen Washington schools dramatically improve the performance of their students when they bring phonics back into the curriculum.

In the Legislature, we have been making reading education a top priority for the past several years. Key legislative leaders have been making a real crusade out of correcting the problems in the way reading is now taught, and bringing effective, research-based techniques back into each and every classroom. That's one step.

The other is accountability. As Clyde Ballard, speaker of the house, recently put it, "When our high schools allow unprepared and unqualified students to graduate, that is a case of education malpractice." Our schools must be responsible and accountable to the public. The speaker has suggested paying for college remedial education classes from the budgets of high schools that graduate students who need remedial course work. These proposals make sense to me.

A record to remember

We don't pass bills and forget about them. Results count, and after we set policy, we make sure it translates to results. Part of our job this year is to implement the major policy reforms we passed in 1997. Thanks to Republican leadership, we have a strong record to build on for 1998. Here's what we'll be monitoring this year:

SPOTLIGHT ON NEW POLICY

What to watch

- **Juvenile justice reform**

- Tougher sentencing standards
- Sentencing alternatives, including boot camps
- Mandatory parental involvement in juvenile court cases
- Juvenile justice grants for local communities
- Juvenile records not sealed automatically

- **Welfare reform**

- Time limits on benefits (five years over one's lifetime)
- Requirements to work, search for work or perform community service
- Child-care, housing, medical and food assistance for working parents
- Job training
- Teen parents must live at home and progress toward a diploma or GED to receive benefits

- **Budget**

- Holding the line on spending
- Protecting I-601 limits

- **Property taxes**

- Temporary 4.7 percent cut in state rate becomes permanent in 1998 (Referendum 47)
- Local governments must vote publicly before raising property taxes above inflation rate

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Rep. Brad Benson
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Your voice counts

Thanks so much to those of you who have taken the time to call or write. I want to make sure you have a chance to share your views with me. If you have a comment, question or concern, please write it in the space below and return it to me, or call me in Olympia at (360) 786-7922. You can also use the toll-free legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000 to leave me a message.

Sincerely, *Brad Benson*

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